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TEN MINUTES
RECOMMENDATION
OF
PRIVATE PRAYER,
CONSIDERED AS TO
ITS PLEASURES AND ADVANTAGES.

By ROBERT HAWKER,
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There are no images or figures, here below, sufficiently expressive, to describe the solid, and substantial pleasures, of private devotion. Neither can language adequately convey, the happiness that soul experiences; who, by constant communion with God, hath learned to realize the Divine presence, in all the occurrences of life.

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Ten Minutes Recommendation.

THE obligation incumbent upon every man to the observance of daily worship, and family prayer, hath already made the subject of a former treatise. *Five Minutes Advice* was humbly offered to the thoughtless and inconsiderate upon this topic: in which was proposed to their serious consideration, the very pressing claims which are upon them to the duty; and the very awful responsibility in which every one is involved concerning it.---And more especially such as are placed at the heads of houses were solemnly reminded of this weighty concern, not only in being interested for their own everlasting welfare, but for the welfare of those immortal souls over whom they exercise a kind of spiritual guardianship. There was nothing knowingly omitted in that little tract which five minutes could furnish for the purpose of persuasion, in order to prevail upon the several readers before whom it might appear, to comply with the advice there given: but every argument and motive which seemed likely to operate upon

rational and accountable creatures, was brought before them, and enforced upon their consciences in the plainest and most affectionate terms possible. What the event of that application hath already been, or may hereafter be, must be left like all other topics, where advice only can be administered, to the good pleasure of Almighty God. The province of man can extend no further. It is the peculiar prerogative of God to give success to every ministration. He hath reserved to himself this efficient blessing: and *we have the sacred treasure of his holy word in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.* It was in an humble dependence upon his divine aid, that that feeble work was undertaken and sent abroad into the world, confiding in the pleasing hope that the blessing of God might rest upon it.---And however unusual it may be to notice it again in this place, I cannot, while the recollection of it is present on my mind, wholly suppress the rising prayer, that it may go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and be like *the bow we read of in scripture, which turned not back, and the sword which returned not empty.** May the Lord mercifully grant that a divine grace may never cease to follow it wheresoever a divine providence shall cause it to come, but

* 2 Sam. i. 22.

that it may prosper in his Almighty hand, and accomplish the thing whereunto he is pleased to send it.

But, my Christian Brother, the present feeble work now presented before you, is intended to answer another, and if possible, as far as it concerns your own *personal* salvation, of an higher and more interesting purpose. The *former* aimed at nothing more than to induce a spirit of piety among the several branches of a family; trusting that where God was pleased to permit the *means* of grace to come, the *end* also might be attained, through his blessing resting upon it: and that our dwellings might be established in peace, when, like *the Man of Uz*, we sanctify our households in the daily sacrifice of prayer.* And what Father is there that can reflect for a moment only on the near and dear ties of kindred in which we are linked in the present world, and especially if he connects with it the recollection of a future and eternal state, which can resist the affectionate claim? My indulgent Reader! are you one of this description, and can you suppress the conscientious discharge of this bounden duty, while alive to all the tender charities of such a relationship?

But however interesting in a relative sense the obligation of family worship may be, the *present* subject I am now upon, becomes yet more per-

* Job i. v.

suasive and animating. For here the matter comes home individually to every man's own bosom. It interests by the strongest of all arguments, and appeals to the heart for attention by the most powerful of all ties; as it regards a man's own everlasting happiness in that day, when all the connections of this life shall be over, and all human affinities shall have ceased: when our several relations in heaven will be similar to what our blessed Lord's was upon earth: *that they are accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, the same will be our brothers, and sisters and mothers!*

I shall assume it for a principle, that this little tract finds my Reader in the habitual practice of daily devotion.---That either influenced by the arguments proposed to his consideration in the former five minutes advice; or convinced by an higher authority arising from divine grace in the heart, whether he be appointed by Providence at the head of a family, or is only an individual of it; he is faithful and conscientious in the stated exercise of this important duty. The first page therefore of my present address will naturally begin where the former left off. I am now, agreeably to the title of this little pamphlet, about to
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Speak by way of recommendation, of the pleasures and advantages of *private* prayer.

Suffer me then, my Brother; with the freedom of one, whose sole object in the question aims at nothing but your happiness, to ask : are you acquainted with *private* prayer? Do you know what it is to enjoy a *personal* acquaintance with God? Have you been accustomed now and then to step aside from the throng and tumult of life, and converse in private with your Maker and your Redeemer? Are you apprehensive what these things mean? If you are unacquainted with this felicity of the soul, you are unacquainted with the purest and most gratifying enjoyment of life. You are a stranger to the noblest privilege of your nature. You have a friend, and *He* an Almighty Friend, in *whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways ; in whom you live, and move, and have your being, and you regard him not. He visits you every moment ; and his compassions are new upon you every morning. He spreads your table, and furnisheth both the means, and the power of enjoyment ; and you sit down unconscious of the presence of the Great Master of the feast : at least you feel nothing of that nameless and inexpressible gratitude of the heart which those enjoy, who eye God in every dispensation. Alas ! my Brother, if this be your case, what a*
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source of the most exquisite joy do you deprive yourself of, from this fatal inattention! Mistake me not, I am not considering the subject, as it concerns your ingratitude towards God; (though that must be painful enough in the reflection, to every feeling and ingenuous mind, but I am now speaking of it simply as it concerns your own happiness. I mean to shew you what an enemy you are to yourself, and to your real and most substantial comfort. That by shutting God out of your constant remembrance, and not having any *private* and *personal* knowledge of your gracious Benefactor; you lose all the relish of those delightful sensations of the soul, which those feel, who walk with God; and are led on through every event by his guiding providences, enjoying that bread which is handed to them in secret.

Neither by these observations do you imagine, I am led to conclude, that you are altogether a total stranger to God. For I presume that by the exercise of family prayer, and in the stated duties of public worship; you have acquired *some* apprehensions of the Divine nature, and have at least upon those occasions learnt to *set the Lord before you*. But if a sense of the Divine presence occupies the mind only in those seasons of worship, this is but a poor
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and confined knowledge of God. Not surely such an acquaintance as every one would wish to acquire, who hath proper apprehensions of the intimate connection in which the soul stands to God, and the sole dependence on which that soul must rest his hopes for every prospect of happiness, both here and hereafter. Would any man be satisfied in the common intercourse of earthly friendship, with such *general* knowledge of any object of affection? Have you any acquaintance you regard; the child, the brother, the parent, or the friend, which is as a man's own soul; and would you be satisfied to see him only now and then in the society of others, where the conversation was common, and all alike interested; and not covet the happiness of being alone with the object of affection? And shall God then, the best of all friends, the nearest and dearest of all possible connections; shall *He* be the only Being in the universe, whose intimate communion and fellowship we are indifferent to possess? Surely, my Brother, if you have the smallest apprehension in what endearing characters the God of your life hath revealed himself to the soul, there is nothing in this lower world would appear equally interesting as to acquire a personal acquaintance with him.—Other objects might, and certainly would,

would, as they are intended from the divine bounty, occupy a proportioned regard, and possess their proper place in the esteem. But the soul would receive a fulness of gratification only from holy communion with Him, who is alone capable of filling its desires.—And the most supreme enjoyment would be in these solemn seasons when the world is shut out, and every perishing object for awhile forgotten, that the soul might be left to the full impression of those divine sensations in the heart, when God manifests himself under these gracious characters, of Him who hath *made* and *redeemed*, and *sanctified* human nature.

In recommendation of this charming principle of a *private* and *personal* knowledge of God, it is not therefore enough to say, that the happiness of another life will in a great measure depend upon it: and that a nearness and communion with our Maker, through the gracious offices of the blessed Redeemer, formed here below, must lead to a greater knowledge of him hereafter: for even all the happiness and enjoyment of every prosperous circumstance in the present state, must derive all its relish from it. The commonest blessings of Providence lose by far the greater part of their relish when not received as coming from his gracious hand. It is the character of men
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of the world to trace the mercies they are continually receiving, to no higher source than worldly strength and worldly wisdom. Chance and fortune are the gods of their apprehension; and hence they have no higher enjoyments than such capricious and uncertain causes afford. But with the pious man things are not so. There is no event of life however small or inconsiderable, but what comes to *him* in the way of a providence. Hence the mercies of every kind he experiences, are for the most part received by prayer, and followed with thanksgiving. And when devotion comes between his wants, and God's supply of them, there is a two-fold sweetness in every enjoyment. The *prayer* which is answered by the mercy given: and the *mercy* itself rendered still more grateful in the recollection and acknowledgment from whose hand it comes. And surely one mercy thus received, infinitely transcends a thousand in the undiscerned and unacknowledged methods of a common providence. Considered then in this point of view, and what a source of the most rapturous enjoyment does this one exercise of the soul open to the truly pious man. He resembles the holy men of old *who walked with God*. He realizes again somewhat of the Patriarchal life when the Lord condescended to assume an human form,

form, and man enjoyed that highly favoured privilege of a familiar interview and conversation with his Maker. For no object, no occurrence, no one event of life is void of God.— He sees him in every thing. He traces his footsteps in every ordination. In solitude, or in society. In the silence of the night as well as in the tumult of the day, he never loses sight of his Almighty Friend and gracious Benefactor. Accustomed to set God always before him; he beholds him on the right hand and on the left; and from every secondary object, he goes on to recognize the first and great predisposing cause of all. Hence not only in seasons peculiarly set apart for sacred worship does he commune with God: but from every place, and by every thing: in the market, as well as in the church, or the closet, his soul is continually drawn out in devout aspirations towards God. For that channel through a gracious Redeemer being always open, the distance between heaven and earth is lost in the contemplation; and the soul of the devout man finds continual *access to the Father by the spirit*: and will be raising out of mere earth and earthly materials, wings for ascension, and like the *Angels* which the *Patriarch* beheld in a vision on the ladder, will be going and returning in a constant

constant succession of adoration before the throne of grace.

My Christian Brother! what do you say to these truths? Shall not the very relation make you long to be a partaker in such superlative felicity? Come then, I pray you, be prevailed upon to enter into your closet. Place yourself there, at least in the way of grace, by which an acquaintance with God may be formed. And though I know full well that the closet possesses no sanctity in itself, neither will it act like a charm to induce a spirit of piety in the soul, (for this can only come from an higher principle) yet you will certainly take the most effectual method to obtain this blessing, and to open a communication between God and the soul, when you lessen the attractions of sense, which too close a commerce with the world, and the concerns of it, necessarily occasion, by stepping aside now and then from all its busy employments, and leaving them as *Abraham* did his servants, *to go yonder and worship*. When a pious man, for this purpose, withdraws into solitude, under a warmth of impression of the solemn interview he is about to engage in, with his Maker and God; what shall then arrest his affections, or stop the tide of an holy and devout frame? It is true, indeed, there is no retreat so sacred, none so retired, which the man

of God can find in the present world, but what is exposed to interruption, and liable to be broken in upon. You cannot enter the closet, so secretly, nor shut to the door so immediately, but what some enemy to devotion will observe, and either press in with you, or importunately knock afterwards for admission. And so disposed is the heart within, in carrying on a traitorous correspondence with the foe without, that too often the soul resembles the siege of the holy city, the gate is thrown open, and troops of vain thoughts lodge in it.* Ah! when will that happy moment come, when the heart shall be occupied wholly by God! Still, however, though the soul be thus interrupted in her wishes to draw nigh to God, and can never be said to be altogether free from disturbance in her approaches to Him; yet most certainly, in retirement and abstraction from the world, the happiest occasions are sought for, to keep off every preventive, and to procure the desired favour. And if ever the soul can be said to feel the real sensations of bliss, which arise out of those inexpressible felicities of communion with God; it must be, in those solemn moments, which are then transacted, unobserved, and unknown by any standers by. When the soul like the *Shunamite's* vessel comes empty

* Jer. iv. 14.

to be filled ; and the divine blessing which is poured out from the Lord, stayeth not, until there be no more room to receive it.*

Oh! that I could raise the soul of my Reader by any thing that is here said, to aspire after an intimate knowledge and acquaintance with these sacred employments! Join your prayers with mine, I beseech you, that a divine light from above may shine upon this page, (without whose illumination, I am fully sensible, it must remain a dead letter) while I shall endeavour to lead you through some of those very weighty arguments which press to the frequent observance of closet devotion. And may the Lord grant that we may both in simplicity of heart follow that *day-dawn and day-star* which shineth as in a dark place, until *the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* be known and experienced by us, as of old it was manifested to them that were with the Redeemer in the holy mount. †

And here, that I may bring the subject into the closest compression of substance possible, I shall be content to pass over unnoticed many arguments, which might be brought forward, into the account, which call loudly to the performance of private prayer, and are in them-

* 2 Kings iv. 3. 6.

† 2 Peter i. 16, 19.

selves unanswerable. I might speak of it as a *duty*, and of the most positive nature, having for its authority, the whole tenor of scripture, to countenance and enforce it. I might safely recommend it also on account of its great *privileges*: for what in point of excellence can be more so, than the permission of sinful dust and ashes to approach God in the near and intimate communion of *personal* worship? I might argue yet further, by way of strengthening these considerations, in observing, *that the uniform example of good men*, in all ages, is all in favour of the practice. None I am persuaded have been remarkably eminent for their attainments in grace, but have been as eminent also, for their observance of closet devotion.—Neither would these considerations be without receiving additional strength in the argument, if they could be followed up, with the testimony of those brilliant examples which have appeared in the lives of devout men of God, on whom a divine blessing hath evidently shined. But the limits to which, in point of time, I am necessarily restricted in the title-page, being *Ten Minutes only*; as well as the plan to which I have confined myself by way of recommending private prayer, which is to be simply on account of *its pleasures and advantages*: these considerations deprive me of
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making use of any other topics of persuasion. And indeed I hope these are enough. For if, dear Reader, I can make it appear to you, by a few plain evidences, that both in point of pleasure and advantage, you are injurious to yourself and your own happiness, if you live in the neglect of this divine and most gratifying of all enjoyments: I shall certainly have accomplished one point at least, in removing that mighty barrier which the mistaken views of men have thrown up against the practice of piety. The world hath advanced a general opinion upon this subject, and the heart is but too easily disposed, to take it upon trust; I mean that a life of piety, must be a life of gloominess and sorrow; and that the sacred employments of the closet are comfortless things. Whereas, in fact, the reverse of this is absolutely the case. In the practice of devotion, the soul not only enjoys in a way of anticipation the *future* rewards of piety, but even finds a *present* satisfaction, superior to every other. And what the Apostle Paul hath said of godliness in general, may with a peculiar propriety of expression be applied to devotion in particular; *it bath the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.* Believe me, my dear Brother, they who would teach you otherwise, are enemies to your best interests;

interests; and like the spies sent to view the promised land, return with a false report to deter you from entering upon the possession of it. Suffer me to intimate the true informers, by bringing before you the clusters of grapes, and the pomëgranates, and the figs, which grow there, that I may invite you to explore the country where such delicious fruits are abounding *.

And this purpose, I flatter myself, shall fully answer; under a divine blessing, if I can make it appear to your satisfaction with clear evidence, that of all pleasures upon earth, the pleasures of devotion are the highest and the best: that they are among the noblest gratifications the soul of man is capable of sustaining in the present state of being: and that when God mercifully proposed himself as the great object of our affection, and invited men to draw nigh to him through a gracious Redeemer, he consulted no less our happiness, than our interest.

One word more, however, I must premise before I enter upon the subject, (though I confess, in this land of Christian knowledge, it might reasonably be presumed all information on this point would be unnecessary) that all approaches to the throne of grace, as well pri-

* Numb. xiii. 23, 32.

vate as public, presuppose that the channel of communication is sought for only through the mediation and by the merits of a Redeemer. We must be united to Christ by a vital union, before that we can possibly enjoy any communion with God. For this is the very foundation of all our hopes of acceptance. Since the fall, man is by nature so depraved, and by sin so far separated from God, that it is impossible he can be again brought nigh but through the blood of Christ. *No man can come to the Father but by Him. He is the way, and the truth, and the life.* Christ therefore is the only medium. And the man that is ignorant of this divine truth, is ignorant of the first and leading principle of all true religion; and is equally unqualified for the worship of God, as well in public as in private. He hath *no fellowship with the Father nor the Son* *. But wherever this fundamental truth of the gospel is known and cherished, nothing surely can afford so charming an encouragement for the soul to approach God in all acts of divine worship, as when invited to draw nigh through the channel of a Redeemer. And to minds under impressions of this devout nature, *personal* communion with God opens the highest and most rapturous enjoyment (as I before observed)

* 1 John i. 3.

the soul of man is capable of sustaining in the present life.

A few observations will be sufficient to set this matter in a clear point of view; and, oh! that they may be accompanied with a divine energy in the heart to lead you to the practice of it by way of experiment of the doctrine.

Dear Reader! I know not by what particular circumstances in the world you are distinguished, and cannot possibly direct what I have to offer by an immediate appeal to your own personal situation in life. Were I to address you under any one express character, whether high or low, rich or poor, young or old, in prosperity or adversity; still I might err wide of the mark in respect to the very person to whom I am now directing my discourse. Hence it is evident, that to make my subject generally useful, I must confine myself to *general* circumstances. Here and there, perhaps, I shall assume the possibility that my Reader is in one or other of the distinct classes of life, and may more directly appeal to him under that express character. But for the most part it must be by *general* observations only, that I am to prove the great excellence of *personal* acquaintance with God, in acts of private piety, and to recommend it merely on principles of pleasure and advantage. But though I certainly lose
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very considerably in point of argument what a personal knowledge of my Reader's situation in life would otherwise afford ; yet one thing I know, let that situation be whatever it may, there is no condition of human nature, but what becomes equally interested in the doctrine.—For as there is no state so prosperous, but what needs a *personal* acquaintance with God, to give the finishing relish to every comfort ; so there is none so wretched, but what must find in this principle somewhat as an alleviation to every trouble.

Let us attend to the investigation of this great truth, and let us attend to it with the closeness of the application so important a subject evidently demands ; and see, whether in point of pleasure, as well as in point of interest and advantage, any object can be proposed to the human mind, which promises equal happiness to that of an intimacy and communion with God.

It hath been supposed by some, that among all the pleasures of life, the purest and most gratifying are those which arise from the intercourse of sincere and disinterested friendship : and perhaps the opinion is well founded. For certain it is, the joys and sorrows of the human
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state are so admirably constituted, that they derive aid from communication. By means of which, the soul imparts, and receives back again, a sacred delight, in her seasons of happiness: and the bitterness of the draught of misery is lessened, when the cup which is full and running over, is made to pour itself into the bosom of a friend. Hence we find, that mankind have constant recourse to this expedient, by way of lessening their troubles, or heightening their enjoyments. And there are few situations, I believe, so solitary and detached, but what will find some kind breast to lean upon in their sorrows, or some friendly heart to pour into of their comforts, through all the departments of social life.

But though these things should seem very clearly to prove, that among the pleasures of the present state, pure and disinterested friendship claim the highest department; yet what human friendship is so pure as to be mixed with no alloy; what regard among men so sincere, as to be free from every principle of selfishness? Alas! such is the corruption, the weakness, the prejudices, and deceitfulness of man, that what from the infirmities of our acquaintance, and the frailties of our own hearts, there are but few friendships of the world which afford real and permanent satisfaction! And even

even indeed if they were more perfect than they generally are ; yet so short and transitory is the tenure of all earthly connections ; that if this be the grand prop on which the soul leans for happiness, how much to be pitied is that man, whose chief comfort rests on so baseless a foundation !

My Brother ! are you one whose heart is susceptible of the tender impressions of friendship ? And are you satisfied in your own mind that the greatest of all pleasures consists in the loving, and being beloved, by some suitable object of affection ? Would you wish to repose your happiness on this security ! Come, then, let me direct you to an object every way calculated to afford you this gratification in the most superlative degree ; and indeed the only Being in the universe capable of satisfying the full wishes of the soul. The Being I mean, is your Maker and your God. He alone can give that joy which the soul requires, to fill her most capacious desires.—And He mercifully proposes himself under this character to your affection, and invites you to the nearest and most intimate communion through the channel of a gracious Redeemer. And what a source of the most exquisite rapture and delight is opened to the mind, to induce you to cultivate this divine acquaintance ? Are you lamenting the

the weakness, mourning over the perfidy, or dissatisfied with the selfishness of earthly friendships; what an immediate remedy to all these evils is found in the strength and faithfulness and disinterested favour of God? Here is friendship, indeed, as far transcending all human friendship as the heavens are higher than the earth! The one permanent, pure, and eternal; the other fluctuating, mingled with much corruption, and of a day. The friendship of man in his highest excellence, like man himself, is but a bubble on the water. The friendship of God can be likened to nothing but the everlasting mountains and the great deep.

And what yet more enhances this supreme felicity, is the consideration with whom man holds this *personal* acquaintance; I mean the infinite greatness of Him who confers this blessing; and the infinite littleness of those who are the objects of his favour. Where it is all condescension, and grace, and goodness on the one part; and all frailty, and imperfection, and unworthiness on the other. Not (as the Apostle John beautifully reasons) *that we have loved him, but that he hath loved us.*

My dear Brother! what can *human* friendship propose to your fondest wishes, which can deserve to be mentioned with this *divine* acquaintance

quaintance with your Maker? Alas! the tenderest alliances have perpetual abatements to make in point of comfort, and the purest friendship hath much alloy mingled with it. And indeed unless the union of hearts is cemented in the love of God, and *earthly* friendship is refined and sublimated by that which is *heavenly*; what is it after all but an unsanctified human passion, subject to caprice, and change, and humour? But, when kindred souls are brought together by this superior attraction, friendship of this kind is not only founded in a fixed and unfluctuating principle; but the objects of it are continually deriving new accessions of happiness in their attachments to each other, from their unity in God. And in this case, so far is the period of all human connections from threatening to lessen their tie, that they look forward to it as the season of complete enjoyment; when the momentary separation on earth will be the prelude, through the Redeemer's merits and love, to their everlasting union in heaven.

My aged Father! (for perhaps I may be speaking to one of this description) I appeal to your heart, and to your long experience with the world, for the truth of what I say. The commerce of many years with mankind cannot but have taught you both the fallacy of all
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human friendships, and the precarious tenure on which the best of them is built. Methinks you are like some old tree of the forest, which hath survived many wintry seasons, and on whose trunk is visible the effects of many pruning dispensations; while all around are to be seen the spots where once your fellow tenants of the grove stood, but which are now gone, and have left you a solitary individual. Say then, my venerable friend! what hath your long experience of many revolving suns taught you? How stands your acquaintance with your God? Hath the departure of your earthly friends, one by one, brought you nearer to an heavenly communion? Have you learnt that sacred art, which none but the true believer in Christ can acquire, to extract divine comforts from human sorrows; and from the disappointments of time, to find consolations in the prospects of eternity? Are the visits of your soul by prayer and meditation, more frequent to that upper world, in proportion as you are every day loosening connection with this; and do you walk continually in holy contemplation on the eternal shore, waiting the uncertain moment of your dismissal hence, that when the Master's call shall come, you may embark in full confidence, through Jesus' strength, for the land of spirits?

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My hoary Reader! if your experience can say Amen to these touchstones of character; and the gracious spirit of our God *beareth witness to your spirit* of this unity of correspondence, you will need no additional persuasion from me, to the perpetual observance of the charming intercourse I am recommending of communion with God.—But if you are unconscious of what these things mean, and are still seeking for consolations amidst the wreck of this world's treasure, with a mind hankering after earth, and earthly pursuits: Alas! my Brother! what shall be found for you, to give any real comfort to the soul! The world presents nothing but a dark and dreary prospect; the profits, the employments, the pleasures of it, are all unsatisfying now; your former acquaintances are gone, and the heart is inaccessible to the disproportioned friendships of youth and years. And where then will you turn your eyes for comfort, or desire to lean your declining head, but in the bosom of your Redeemer and your God? My dear Reader! May He who alone can awaken seriousness in the mind, or give gracious desires to the heart, both awaken and invigorate all that is needful to your present state; and cause you to know and seek *the things which make for thine everlasting*

lasting peace, before they are for ever hid from thine eyes.

But while I am thus making a particular application of my subject to the case of the aged, in order more fully to convince the reader of long experience in life, from his own personal knowledge, how incompetent all friendship, but the friendship of God, is to give real and permanent satisfaction to the soul of man: perhaps some poorer Brother, who peruses this page, and whose humble circumstances in the world may have rendered him unacquainted with any experimental knowledge of such effects, will be led therefrom to conclude, that these are observations in which he is altogether unconcerned. But in this he will be mistaken. For the argument to the cultivation of the divine acquaintance is equally pressing, whether a man hath made the experience, of the unsatisfying nature of all earthly connections to comfort the heart, or whether he hath not. And surely it never can be supposed, that the poor and afflicted soul who stands solitary and detached, without a single person upon earth whom he can call his friend, can be less interested to seek the friendship of Heaven, than the man who prides himself in his rich connections! But how is the argument heightened, to the humble and friendless believer, when he
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goes on to consider the peculiarly encouraging and endearing characters, in which the God of his life hath revealed himself to his apprehensions : as *the bearer of the poor when he crieth, the needy also, and him that hath no helper* : as the High and Holy One, that *looketh to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at God's word* ; proposing himself as the never-failing *Comforter* of his people, and inviting the afflicted and disconsolate of every description to draw nigh in, and through the Redeemer's name, and *to cast all their burden upon Him who careth for them* : What a volume of persuasion is found in those charming representations of the divine benignity ?

My dear Brother of humble degree, whoever you are, before whom these lines appear, pause one moment, I beseech you, and ask your own heart what can the noblest earthly friendship propose worthy to be mentioned in competition with this divine and heavenly principle ? And if so, what cause can there be to murmur the want of any human friendship, when a man hath this Almighty Friend in the heavens always to look up to ? Must it not argue then a deficiency in this sacred acquaintance, when it becomes not sufficient to supply the absence of all creature comforts ? Can that gracious soul ever be said to be lonely and
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friendless,

friendless, who knows, by his own experience, what the Apostle found in his; *Truly to have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?* A fellowship always at hand; a friendship ever open to immediate access at all times, at all places, and upon all occasions! Oh! the unknown raptures that soul enjoys who draws all his sources of happiness from this inexhaustible fountain! *For when the poor and needy seek water, (to use the beautiful figure of scripture) and their tongue faileth for thirst; the Lord will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of vallies.* For thus the promise runs: *I the Lord will bear them. I the God of Israel will not forsake them* *. And when to the tender call of God, with which he sometimes whispers that gracious invitation to his people, *Seek ye my face*; the believer can echo back the awakened prayer, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek.* In such moments the soul feels an animation lifting it above every thing here below; as if the body was left like a dead carcase upon the earth without its immortal inhabitant, while the spirit is borne aloft on the wings of devout meditation, and is ascended up before God. My Brother! do you in the present moment experience any thing of this divine life? *Shut the book, I beseech you, in*

* Isaiah xli. 17, 18.

order to *open* your heart still more to the devout impressions. And may the Lord enable you to enter into the animated feeling of the Psalmist's devotion, until you have imbibed a portion of his spirit, and can adopt from the soul the same divine sentiments as he experienced. *I have seen an end of all perfection.—Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth which I desire in comparison of thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever*.*

Enough hath been said, I hope, under the first branch of the argument, to prove, that if friendship be considered as a principal source of happiness to mankind, as that it must in a very high degree; no friendship but that which is formed with God can be competent to answer this purpose, or fully satisfy the desires of the human soul.

But friendship is but one, among many avenues by which man proposes to enter upon the enjoyment of happiness. The world is engaged in the everlasting pursuit of this principle; and every one is sending out continually into the highways and streets of the city, with the enquiry, *Who will shew us any good?* And while the search is made among the various

* Psalm lxxii. 25.

objects of *creature* comforts ; whatever experiments are tried, or however the different stages of life may hope to find it in *this*, rather than in *that* proposed scheme of earthly felicity, it is but turning the mind from one vanity to another, and *seeking the living among the dead*, while exploring any of the vain and unsatisfying joys of this world's good. For it is the *soul* which wants to be comforted ; and nothing but the Creator himself can satisfy this immortal principle either here, or hereafter.

Ask that man, I beseech you, who hath ever known what it is to enjoy the happiness of an intimacy and communion with God ; whether, in the absence of this inexpressible enjoyment, creature gratifications of any kind can satisfy the soul ? Oh ! he will tell you that the wealth of worlds cannot compensate for the want of it ; that nothing but what is sanctified by the divine presence can give delight to his heart. *Lord*, he will say, *lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me, and it shall put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when corn, and wine, and oil increase* *. In the intermission of this supreme enjoyment, the soul of a real Christian finds no rest or pleasure. All is darkness, and the shadow of death. But when the Lord returns, and imparts some manifestations of his renewed grace and love ; like the sun break-

* Psalm iv. 6, 7.

ing from behind the hidden cloud, and gladdening the whole hemisphere, the believer rejoices in the enlightened mercy, and exults in the language of the Psalmist, *Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee!*

My Brother! does your experience correspond to this doctrine, *as in water face answereth to face?* You will know then the infinite value of that rest to which the soul returns when God is his portion. A rest which *remaineth for the people of God* in its full perfection in another life, but which is begun in part in the present. A rest, indeed, which none but the redeemed know, or can partake of, and which nothing less than the blood of Christ could purchase or obtain. Men of the world may have their other enjoyments and pleasures. The providence of God is for ever bestowing his mercies in a plentiful profusion upon the evil as well as upon the good; and sending the blessings of his rain both upon the just and the unjust. They have apparently alike an indiscriminate use of all the good things of his providence; health, and wealth, and children, and houses, and lands, and possessions. But it is the privilege of his redeemed people only, to sit down to the feast and the real enjoyments of those *outward* blessings of his providence,
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from the sanctifying effects they feel of his *inward* grace. Oh ! did men of the world but know the immense difference between a sanctified and an unsanctified mercy ; could they but once be made sensible of the infinite disparity in the enjoyment even of the commonest blessings of life, between those *who mind earthly things*, and those *whose conversation is in heaven* : how would they turn with indifference from almost every thing of *creature* comforts only, and in which no traces or remembrance of the Great Creator was found to give a finishing relish to the whole enjoyment ! I do not wonder, indeed, that men of pleasure, as they are called, should find such perpetual restlessness and dissatisfaction in the various objects of their pursuit. For surely the card-table and the play-house, the midnight assembly, and the silly amusements of the ball-room, were never calculated to satisfy the desires of the human soul in its pursuit of happiness. And I protest, that independent of all other considerations, had I my choice, I would by far prefer the unconscious state of being in a bird, or an harmless reptile of the earth, to the character of an intelligent and accountable creature, upon such terms of existence. Humanity pities the fly, which, in the absence of the sun, is attracted by the faint light of a candle, and hovers round
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it again and again, until by approaching too near, it burns itself in the flame, and dies in agonies of pain. But what a flood of tears might we weep over those senseless beings who profess to be under the influence of a divine luminary, the Sun of Righteousness, and yet instead of seeking their happiness from Him who is the light and the life of man, like the ignorant insect just mentioned, flutter round the taper of any meteor of vanity, and prosecute the dangerous delusion till they sink under a disabled body, and lie down in disappointment and sorrow!

My dear Reader! (for by what other name shall I call you) are you in the present hour seeking your supreme happiness from the *creature of any description*; and are these arguments not convincing enough, to shew you the extreme folly of your choice? Go, then, my Brother, go on, and prosecute the same round of unthinking and unsatisfying pursuits; compass yourself about with the sparks of vanity, and walk in the light of the fire of folly, which you have kindled: but tremble at the awful consequence which God hath decreed to be the termination of such a life. *This shall you have of mine hand, you shall lie down in sorrow**.

Oh! how it moves one's pity to see the

* Isaiah l. 11.

rich provision the great Author of our nature hath made, to recover the fallen objects of his bounty from a state of sin to salvation, through the wonderful labours and sufferings of the Son of God; and that under the gracious helps afforded, man hath only to implore grace to raise himself by the exercise of faith and prayer to a nearness and communion with God in this life, that after this preliminary state of things is finished, he may be translated into his immediate presence, there with him for ever eternally to dwell; and yet that such a profusion of goodness should be lost upon the mass of mankind who are sunk in sin and sensuality, and live as without God in the world, unconscious of the divine love, strangers to the Redeemer's salvation, and know not, in respects to the saving effects of his power on the heart, *whether there be any Holy Ghost*. Can it be possible that the happiness of seeing God, and dwelling for ever under the light of his divine countenance, can be reserved in heaven for minds so earthly and sensual? Do they in reality hope one day for ever to be with the Lord, and yet now shun all acquaintance, and desire no intimacy with him? Alas! to what a melancholy state hath sin reduced all the faculties of the soul! Lord, do thou lift up the light of thy countenance upon our hearts. Suffer us

not

not to be lost for ever, amidst this darkness of the human estate, nor wander without a guide in the fruitless pursuit of imaginary prospects of good. But bring us to the knowledge of thyself in the face of Jesus Christ; whom truly to know is everlasting life; that from being acquainted with God, we may be at peace with him, and in his light see light!

And now I should hope, from all that hath been said, the mind can require no additional argument by way of conviction, that the only solid and substantial happiness of life, must be found in communion with God; and that the man who is seeking pleasure from any other source is erring widely from the mark. *The deep saith it is not in me; and the sea saith it is not in me.* Would you, my Brother, then possess real and true happiness, that happiness must be found in God; and when the soul of the awakened believer is enabled to enjoy communion with Him through the channel of the Redeemer's love; all other gratifications will appear in comparison thereof, but *as the drop of the bucket, or as the small dust of the balance**.

If any thing remained to finish the subject, by way of recommending this charming principle of personal acquaintance and prayer with God, more than from the *pleasures* of it, a large

* Isaiah xl. 15.

space opens for saying just as much, in respect to its *advantages* also; for these are equally ample, and furnish occasion in as extensive a degree as the circumstances of human life can possibly supply. There is no situation either of joy or sorrow; no one event in which a man can be placed, but what must find advantage from private prayer, and brings with it in its hand a recommendation to the observance of the duty. Men of the world, persons whose existence is spent in the pursuits and employments, or pleasures, as they are called, of the world; from not knowing the solid and substantial enjoyments and advantages of communion with God, are at a loss to conceive how it is possible to receive happiness from prayer, or what can be the perpetual subjects to employ the pious man in his seasons of devotion.— They have asked therefore with much seeming surprise, what can a man have to say to God so frequently; and what can occupy the mind in the large portions of time he spends in retirement and prayer? But in answer to this childish enquiry, the real and sincere Christian replies, What have I *not* to say to my Redeemer and my God, upon the numerous and important subjects in which my whole nature is involved, and in relation to those grand interests in which God hath been graciously pleased to reveal himself to my soul. There is nothing
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hat concerns me either in time or eternity,
 out what comes in for a place in my devotion.
 My own wants are so many and continual;
 my sins and departures from duty so frequent
 and aggravated; and the blessings I am for-
 ever receiving so great and undeserved, that
 motives of prayer and of praise are arising all
 around me every hour. And were my own
personal interests less than they are, yet when
 I look round the world, and consider the ten-
 der charities of life; my family, my relations,
 my friends, the world at large, the unbeliev-
 ing, insensible, and wicked world: those who
 know not God, and those who are too grace-
 less to pray for themselves; and more especially
 that Zion, that Church of Christ, which is
 dear to the Redeemer, and whose name is writ-
 ten on the palms of his hands, and therefore
 cannot but be dear to all his people: these
 furnish out so many and such constant occasions
 for prayer, that I never find the want of sub-
 ject what to say to my heavenly Father; but
 I find too often, indeed, the want of inclina-
 tion to draw nigh to him. My heart is so
 cold and languid, and divine things operate so
 little upon me in proportion to their import-
 ance, that I have much reason to adopt the
 Apostle's sentiment as my own, *When I would
 do good, evil is present with me.*

Speak ye, whose experience of the heart
D 2 testifies

testifies to the truth of these observations, is it not a faithful account of what passes continually within? You therefore cannot require that I should describe to *you* the *advantages* of personal communion and prayer with God, who find a needs be for it upon every occasion, and are only lamenting too frequently a disinclination to a practice which brings with it both a pleasure and a reward. But would to God that any thing I could say, in addition to the arguments I have brought forward, to prove the *pleasures* of devotion could operate upon minds that are strangers to this divine principle, and know not the enjoyments of the closet, to prompt them to listen to those persuasions, which arise out of the *advantages* of it also. Shall I beg of you, my Christian Brother, (if perchance I speak to one of this description on the present moment) shall I beg of you to pause, and consider with yourself; the situation in which you stand in this world, and the very awful prospects opening before you in another; and then ask your own heart whether there must not be the most obvious advantages resulting from the practice of *personal* communion and acquaintance with God; and whether the duties leading to it are not such as render the duty absolutely necessary and unavoidable? Have you ever considered the fallen and corrupt state in which you was
born,

born, and the transgression in which you have lived? Have you contemplated, as you ought, the weakness and impotence of man, and the continual help he stands in need from God; the rich provision made for a recovery in the Redeemer's atoning merits and blood; and the plentiful assistance of grace which is promised to aid human weakness when asked in prayer? And will not the conviction of these solemn truths compel you to seek a *personal* acquaintance with God, for the attainment of such desirable and indispensable blessings? Is it possible for the soul to be impressed with a sense of sin, and lift no voice of supplication to Heaven in *private* for a deliverance from it; or to consider the rich fountain which is opened for sin, and for all uncleanness, in the Redeemer's blood; and yet feel no desire, use no entreaty, to be washed from the guilt of it? Can it be possible that any man can coolly look round, and behold himself placed in this world in a state of trial and probation, exposed to innumerable enemies both from within and from without; subject to almost an infinite variety of temptations, sicknesses, and sorrows; together with all the numberless, nameless evils incident to a fallen state; helpless in himself, and hopeless in respect to all human power, and yet never retire in private to the reflection of a serious thought, or seek in solitude that personal com-

munion and acquaintance with God, by which divine strength might be imparted to succour human infirmity ! Alas ! my Brother, if these and the like solemn considerations have not employed the attention of *many* a thoughtful hour ; it is not because they are not sufficiently interesting, or have not again and again demanded that attention in the loudest calls of necessity : but because other objects among the frivolous and vain pursuits of a thoughtless mind, like the fowls upon the sacrifice of *Abraham*, have driven them away ; and every serious impression hath been buried under a heap of rubbish and folly.

Dear inconsiderate Christian ! think once more, I charge you, before it be too late, of the importance of what is here recommended to your most serious regard, and the infinite advantage that must result from its observance. Retire but for a moment, and open your breast to a conviction of the plainest and most palpable truths in nature. Call to mind your fallen state ; consider, awfully consider, the sad and irremediable consequences of departing out of life in that state, with a nature unregenerated, and a soul uncleansed in the blood of Christ : anticipate that solemn hour, which cannot be far remote, and may be near indeed, when physicians, attendants, relations, and friends, will be all standing perhaps around
your

your dying bed, unable to administer any thing more than the fruitless wish, or the ineffectual medicine to prolong life. And if in that trying season you have no *personal* knowledge of God, no interest in Christ, nor communion with the blessed Spirit; of what avail will be all the surrounding circumstances to the departing soul? *Miserable comforters are they all!* Oh! that you would fold down this leaf as a memorandum frequently to look at it, until its contents are folded properly in your mind, and the spirit of grace hath wrought conviction in your heart, and *Christ be formed in you the hope of glory.*

But I turn from this consideration, to drop one word more to the pious frequenter of the closet; not indeed by way of pointing out to him the advantages of such an employment, for that I hope is unnecessary; but by way of strengthening his hands in the service, in the recollection of the many important causes which beside his own *personal* concerns are calling upon him from every quarter, and begging aloud for an interest in his prayers. Oh! what a gracious opportunity hath the pious servant of God, when drawing nigh the mercy seat, and when feeling his soul warmed with the spirit of devotion, to put in a petition for his friends after the flesh; the poor and the distressed members of Christ, wherever situated, or however scattered; the graceless, and
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the unconcerned ; the long-lost wanderer, and the afflicted in mind : in short, persons of every description ! In how many ways, and by what various opportunities, may every real and sincerely awakened Christian, water the church with his prayers, and bless the world ? And will you not, my Christian Brother, upon those solemn moments, when drawing nigh to God, feel somewhat of that compassionate spirit which actuated the holy prophet in the mount, when a long acquaintance with God made him for a while forget his own personal interest to attend to the interest of others *. Particularly *you* that are parents need not surely the smallest memento, to prompt you to bear your children on the wings of your devotion before the throne of grace. Every pious father, I am persuaded, is for ever adding new petitions in the court of heaven for renewed mercy on his offspring ; and certainly the earnest prayers of such parents are filed (if I may so say) on the divine records in everlasting remembrance. Oh ! what a comfort is it when a devout parent has an interest in heaven for his children, frequently makes a visit there, and lodges all his requests before God, and from thence draws all his expectations for them ! With what composure must he lay down his head upon a dying pillow, when like Jesus he can commit his chil-

* See Exodus xxxii. 32.

dren and all their concerns into the divine hand, as Christ did his followers, and from the self same argument : *Now I am no more in the world; but these are in the world: keep them through thy truth.* Do you not believe such prayers ascend with a peculiar and prevailing energy before the throne of grace, presented as they are through the Redeemer's name, and sanctified by his atoning blood ? Oh yes ! numberless are the instances where they have been answered, years after the pious petitioners themselves have been silent in the dust. Ye that are praying fathers therefore be not discouraged. Hold on, and hold out.—It is impossible a single petition offered in faith can be unheard, or in the end unsuccessful. Graceless children may slight all your admonitions : they may long treat your tenderest entreaties with coldness and disdain. But one remedy always remains in which you *can* promote their good, even against their will. Fly to the throne of grace. Lodge all your wishes there. Prayer hath been known to open the windows of heaven, and bring down a blessing to soften the hardest heart, and to induce a spirit of grace and supplication in the most stubborn mind, when every other method hath failed. And mark it down, I beseech you, as a never-failing maxim, to form a judgment, both of the certain success of your devotions, and as
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an encouragement to a perseverance in the duty : That *the prayer which is awakened by grace, must be answered in mercy.* For it is the Lord which giveth both the *disposition* to pray, and proposes the *subject* of prayer to the mind, and enables the heart to *watch*, and *depend in faith* for the fulfilment of all God's gracious promises. And never did the Lord pour out upon any soul these gifts of his blessed spirit, but with an intention to render them effectual. Remember the words of the Redeemer. *All things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive* *.

I must not forget, among the advantages of private prayer, to observe one singular privilege more which it proposes, in preference to every other means of grace : I mean in that it is not limited to *time* or *place*, or confined to *person*, but universally open to all, and may be prosecuted by the pious character upon every occasion. In this respect it surpasses indeed even the advantage of *public* or *family* worship. For the stated periods of those duties must be embraced in the seasons appointed for them, or as it suits the convenience of the several characters which compose the congregation ; and if those seasons are passed by, the opportunity is lost. But a private, personal drawing nigh to God may be embraced as frequently

* Matt. xxi. 22.

as the soul desires communion. No place precludes it ; no situation or employment prevents it. The poor man, who hath no closet to enter, may enter into his own heart, and his devotions may go up before God, while his hands are engaged in the ordinary employments of life, as well as when withdrawing from the world to enjoy more immediate communion with God. I do not mean to say that opportunities are not to be sought for by way of indulging in a more unrestrained manner the devout affections, where conveniency and a situation in life favours the object. But what I mean to say is, that neither the busiest life, nor any honest worldly calling, can become a preventive to quench the devout flame. Holy men of old found opportunities in the midst of idolatrous people, and even in the most trying and adverse situations, to enjoy intercourse and communion with God. The example of *Nehemiah* stands upon everlasting record, to shew that a *servant* may wait at table, or with his *hands* employed in his necessary labour, while his *heart* may be drawn out towards the Lord, and pouring forth the incense of prayer *. And *Daniel's* history presents an equally memorable proof, that a life engaged in the greatest circle, or occupied in the highest departments of worldly affairs, may find time for the sacred

* See *Nehemiah*, chap. i. ii, and iv.

and self-rewarding service of private prayer *. And that poverty or suffering become no hindrance to this duty, is evident, for *Job* prayed on a dunghill, and *Jeremiah* in a prison. The Apostle *Peter* sought the house-top, and the Apostle *Paul* used the sea-shore. In short, all places suit, and may be made sacred to this delightful employment. Nay, think only how the Redeemer himself, who needed not the aid of prayer, yet hath shewn that all spots may be hallowed to the service when the heart is awakened to the desire of it: the *garden* and the *mountain* were his retreats to enjoy communion with his Father. But that the great and important work he came on earth to perform might receive no interruption from this secret employment, he suffered not the duties of the day to be broken in upon, but borrowed from the silence of the night for this purpose; and *when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray.*

O thou adored Redeemer! how doth thy warm and bright example challenge our cold and lifeless hearts, to imitate, what we cannot but admire, and to follow thee whithersoever thou goest! Surely, the man, who can contemplate such actions in the life of Jesus, and can consider to what the whole of that life was intended to minister, and yet finds no dispo-

* See Daniel vi. 1.---10 et passim.

sition to do as he hath done, may very justly apply to his own heart, that awakening expostulation which Christ used to his disciples upon another occasion: *What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.* Hath the Redeemer spent whole nights in prayer for us, and shall we think it too much to give one hour to him?

To plead want of time, or multiplicity of business, is the weakest and most senseless pretence imaginable.—What pursuits of this lower world ought to be prosecuted with that intense application as to leave no time for attention to *the one thing needful*? Besides, so far is a multiplicity of worldly avocations from becoming a reasonable excuse for the neglect of religious duty, that it forms of itself the highest possible motive to the more frequent practice of it. For he whose life is spent amidst the greatest circle of business, will need the greater grace to keep him unspotted from the world. And if the day be too short to admit of the sober claims of private prayer, those claims may be answered in taking from the slumber of the night. *David* found this an happy expedient amidst the concerns of his busy life, and hath left upon everlasting record the good effects of it. *At midnight* (says he) *will I rise to give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that*
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I might be occupied in thy word. The Lord hath granted his loving kindness in the day-time, and in the night-season did I sing of him, and made my prayer unto the God of my life. I have thought upon thy name, O Lord, in the night-season, and received comfort. My soul fleeth unto the Lord before the morning watch.

Ye men of business ! Ye sons of labour ! Ye who rise early, late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness ! say, what can the most busy life find in extenuation to justify a neglect of this most necessary and self-rewarding duty ? Oh ! that mankind could learn that first and grand rule, of all that is truly valuable in arithmetic ; so to *number their days as to apply their hearts unto wisdom* ; for then would the upshot of the business with an abiding impression, never to be worn out upon the mind, that solemn sentence of Christ, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?*

Bear with me, indulgent Reader, while I offer but one observation more, as a finishing consideration to the whole argument ; and which shall be only to say, that I consider the love of private prayer and secret communion with God as one of the truest evidences that a divine life is begun in the soul, and the surest method of ascertaining a real religious character.

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I have often thought what a world of trial, and labour, and fatigue, some men go through, merely to appear what they are not. Oh! the madneis and the folly of all follies, in being outside religious, if I may so call it. That ever any man should desire to be considered *that*, which hardly will gain him in the eyes of the world common reputation; and if it be a name only, without the life of godliness, must expose him but to the severer judgment of Almighty God!

My Friend! would you really wish to know whether this be your case? The secret and unseen employment of the closet between God and your own soul, will bring you very speedily to the clearest investigation of this matter.—*What is the hope of the hypocrite (says Job) when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him? Will he always call upon God*? Yes! He may call upon God. But it will be in the public worship, when the eyes of others are upon him. But will he call upon God in private, when no eye seeth him? Yes! perhaps even here also, the effect of education shall lead him to the form of prayer in private as well as public. Children brought up by godly parents will hardly be able to throw off altogether in riper years the custom of early habits. But will he delight himself in God?*

* Job xxvii. 8, 9, 10.

No ! that is impossible. Here therefore is the grand discrimination of character.—The hypocrite as well as the man of real piety *may* pray, *may* call upon God, *may* assume the mask of religion, and impose on the eyes of the world. But to *delight himself in God* ; to take a pleasure, and feel a joy unspeakable in the religious duties and employments of the closet ; this can be the portion only of the real servant of the Lord. Reader ! make application of this decisive evidence to yourself. Ask your own heart this question, *Do I delight in God ?*

I have now finished all that I intended to offer upon this subject, and shall have cause to bless God, if any thing that is here said, may serve as an instrument in the Divine hand to lead to the duties of the closet. I have done to the best of my ability upon the occasion.—Would to God that I possessed the skill to have done better ! But the highest human powers are alike incompetent to persuade, unless accompanied with a divine effect. If this be wanting, the whole must prove ineffectual ; and like the weeping sisters mentioned in the gospel, I may take up a similar lamentation, and say, *Lord ! if thou hadst been here, my labour had not died.* But, to carry on the same reasoning, *I know that even now, if we will ask this blessing from God, God will give it us.* Before

fore therefore you shut the book, dear Reader, ask once more for that wisdom which is from above, which can alone lead to the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Our eyes are unto thee, Almighty Power, that thou wouldst be graciously pleased to order that this feeble work *may not return void, but accomplish that which thou pleatest, and prosper in the thing whereto thou sends it.* Amen.

FRAGMENT.

I WOULD fain cherish the hope, that the arguments made use of, in the preceding Treatise, in the recommendation of *private* prayer, carry with them a power of persuasion, not easily to be resisted; and that through the divine blessing accompanying them, some one or other, at least, of my readers, may have been led to form this conclusion from the perusal, (which indeed is the evident result of the whole) that no real Christian can possibly live in the neglect of so important a branch of duty.

But I shall have answered only in part the purpose intended from this little tract, (even if any reader should be led thereby to his closet,) unless it serves at the same time to give him a clear idea of the manner in which the service itself must be performed. I conceive it to be very possible, that much time may be spent in the closet, and yet the soul not enriched. For if men take the world with them into their retirements, and even *there* are more engaged in the consideration of things temporal, than things eternal; if the scriptures

be then read for the purpose of answering the claims of duty, and not to promote the interests of religion, and the pleasures of the mind; or if the devotion of the closet be the mere huddling over a form of heartless prayers, in which the soul feels no interest; may not the awful appeal of God, by the Prophet, be justly applied to such cases: *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord!*

If I have been happy enough therefore to convince any reader of the great importance of the duty here recommended; I would wish to follow up that conviction, in offering, by way of *Fragment*, a few observations on the proper method by which it can be discharged, so as to answer the purposes of piety, and procure the pleasures and advantages it promises. — And I shall esteem my labour most happily devoted, if it serves under God's grace, to guide any one uninformed reader to a better apprehension than he before possessed, of this capital branch in a Christian's duty.

It must be obvious, I think, to any one of the smallest reflection, that prayer of every kind, whether in public or private, to render it acceptable to God, or profitable to man, must proceed from the heart. The very nature of prayer implies this. For it is a sense of want which creates the necessity of prayer, awakens desires in the heart, and gives expression to the tongue: and unless our prayers are induced from this cause, however the lips may utter a form of words, the heart will be altogether uninterested, and unconcerned in the petition. Now if this be the truest description of prayer, (as that I believe no one will deny) it will necessarily follow, that the greatest qualification to render prayer profitable, under the immediate teachings of God's holy spirit, (indeed the only one next to the possessing just notions of the Being we address, and the channel

channel by which all prayers can be presented with a prospect of success before him) is to have a lively apprehension of the mercies we stand in need of, and which a real sense of want only can prompt the heart to seek. And as every man must, in the very nature of things, be supposed best to know his own wants, every man is certainly best competent to make those wants known unto God. Hence, therefore, however forms of prayer, and books of devotion may be allowed as useful, or even necessary for the purposes of *public* worship, or *family* piety; yet *private*, *personal* communion with God, can need no such helps, neither indeed can they come up to all the purposes required. In the solemn transactions between God and the soul, so various are the situations in which a man is placed in this world; so different are the dispensations of Providence and Grace, with which he is continually exercised; so many are the circumstances which distinguish one from another in the condition of human life; that it is impossible that any form of prayer can express what the soul hath to say to God in those delightful moments when drawing nigh to him. Private, personal prayer must be the prayer of the heart, to express all the wants of the soul; and in this respect, therefore, all men are alike competent to the discharge of it. The most ignorant, as well as the most accomplished. The man who cannot read, as well as he who is master of many languages, are all upon the level. For though one may possess the power of expressing his thoughts in a better form of words than the other, yet when it be considered to whom prayer is made, and the sole purposes it is intended to answer; it is plain that the frame of the soul, and not the form of words, is what the Almighty regards in all approaches towards him.

My

My humble friend! are you at a loss what to say unto God in those moments when drawing nigh unto him? Consult, I beseech you, your heart upon the occasion. Previously examine what are your wants and your desires. For if you are truly sensible of these things, it is impossible you can be ignorant of the manner of expressing them. A real, lively, abiding sense of want cannot fail to give desires to the soul, and language to the tongue. *Out of the abundance of the heart* (our Lord hath said) *the mouth speaketh*.— A just apprehension of the sins of our fallen nature; a proper knowledge of the rich provision of mercy made for those sins in the benignity of God through Jesus Christ; an awakened sense of the awful objects of eternity, and the consciousness that these infinitely solemn and momentous concerns are all suspended on the frail thread of human life: these subjects once impressed in their proper characters on the mind, will call up the voice of supplication, and *make the tongue of the stammerer speak plainly* *. Men may fancy what they please of inability to express themselves suitably in prayer, but it is not the want of words, but the want of feeling. The fact is, they are not sufficiently interested in the object of their prayers, and therefore do not find (as well they may not, under such circumstances) the fervour of piety, arising from the vacant heart. Ask the man who lives by alms, what it is which furnishes his mouth with arguments from day to day, to prosecute his trade of begging; let him say what it is which makes him so clamorous in his petitions, and gives him that ceaseless importunity, which takes no denial. He will tell you, that it is the pressing calls of hunger and want; and these are the stimulants which teach him,

Isaiah xxii. 4.

without

without the aid of books, how to express the sense he has of his misery. And strange indeed would it be, that his wants, if real, should need such assistance. It would be a novel sight truly, and as ridiculous as new, to see a beggar opening a book to read from it his suit for alms. And shall a poor, miserable, untutored creature, possess that art of persuasion among men, merely from the dictates of nature only, because he feels the pressing wants of the perishing body; and shall you, or I, with all the aids of grace on our side, while awakened to a suitable earnestness, in seeking the everlasting welfare of the soul, be apprehensive, we cannot properly express our wants before God? Can the form of words, or the *manner* of expression, be so very important a part in prayer, if the heart be *really* interested; especially when it be considered to *whom* we speak? One, who hath made us what we are, is better informed of our abilities than we are ourselves; and will not, we are assured, require from us what we are not qualified to perform, and like an hard and unfeeling master, expect to reap where he hath not sown! And is it possible then, that any man can be sensible of these things; can really look up to God under those endearing characters in which he is revealed in scripture, as *the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort*; who is both the *giver*, the *bearer*, and the *rewarder* of prayer; and who, in order to lessen that infinite distance between his unspotted holiness, and the unworthy objects of his favour, hath appointed the medium of his divine Son, and offered the aids of his blessed spirit, to bring men to his mercy seat; and hath expressly promised that *all things whatsoever we ask* in the faith of the Redeemer's name, and relying on his atoning blood, *believing we shall receive*? Is it possible, I say, that any man can view the throne of grace thus encircled

circled with mercy, and can find his heart properly affected under all these impressions, and yet be at a loss for a suitable manner of making his requests known unto God? Oh! how much we degrade God while we think to honour him, and how grossly do we injure our own souls, and deprive them of their chief pleasure, when we damp the ardour of devotion, by such needless and unbecoming apprehensions! Go, my Brother, go into thy closet; recollect *who hath made man's mouth, or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind!* Apply the same promise to thyself, which the Man of God received, to give him confidence in the execution of his commission: *I will be with thy mouth, (said God) and teach thee what thou shalt say* *. And if you can but *feel* a real sense of your wants; though the lips be unable to express what the heart sustains, and like *Hezekiah* †, can only mourn in broken sentences before God: nay, even the spirit can but bow down in humble silence before Him; *The sorrowful sighing of the prisoners* must come up with prevailing energy, we are assured, through that channel of acceptance in the Great Redeemer's intercession, which never fails. And who knows, but perhaps, at length like *David*, in a similar situation, *while the heart is musing, the sacred fire may kindle, and at the last you may speak with your tongue* ‡?

I hope no one, either designedly or inadvertently, will misconstrue what I say, as if from hence I meant to discountenance books of devotion in *public*, or *social* worship. Such intentions are foreign to my thoughts. I have ever considered, indeed, that the *general* wants of a congregation assembled for the purpose of divine worship, are best expressed by a form of devotion which may comprehend most advantageously their

* Exodus iv. † Isaiah xxxviii. ‡ Psalm xxxix.

*general necessities and desires: and in a former publication I have expressed my sentiments more fully upon the subject *. But I am here speaking of the private personal devotion of the closet, which I cannot but think in all cases, and without exception, requires no such aids, but their use rather tend to cramp the spirit of piety, and tempt the mind to lean on the form, while forgetting the power of godliness. And the more I consider the subject, the more I am convinced of the propriety of the observation; and am only astonished, that the very obvious reasons on which it is founded, do not carry with them the same conviction to every mind. Every possible apprehension, arising from a just sense of the infinite perfections of God, and the unworthiness of man; and the fear which keeps back the soul in her devout aspirations, are all removed in the consideration of those gracious and encouraging helps which are held forth, inviting us to draw nigh. Since God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into our hearts, we are now enabled to cry Abba, Father! Since we have such an High Priest over the house of God, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we ought to draw near in full assurance of faith. And since we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, shall we not, as the Apostle recommends, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need? Methinks the spirit of bondage again to fear, ought now to give way to the spirit of adoption. And while that animating voice is heard from the sanctuary, (or which is just the same thing, the call of God in his word) Seek ye my face; the heart may intuitively reply, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. And if in this manner you seek the Lord, the promise is absolute, Thou shalt find*

* See a little tract entitled the Misericordia.

him : if thou seek him with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.* For the Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him, yea all such as call upon him faithfully. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him, he also will hear their cry, and will save them †.

And now, what shall I say more, either in recommendation of the principle of *private* prayer itself, or of the best method of performing it? I am come, indeed, to the last page in my book, and had I any better argument to offer, (which I confess, indeed, I have not) there would be no more room to write it. The thought of this, however, awakens a serious reflection (which in conclusion, I shall beg to leave on the mind of my Reader) of the necessity of filling, in the pages of the book of the present life, with every possible improvement, before we come to the end of it, when nothing more can be added. And as you, my indulgent friend, (who have been kind enough to accompany me thus far) will shortly enter also upon the last leaf of your *own* history, as you are now finishing the last leaf of this humble work : Suffer me to write the final lines of this little fragment, and to serve the whole up before you on the knee of prayer ; that God in mercy may sanctify it to the improvement of both Writer and Reader, that it may make us *wise unto salvation, through the faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

* Deut. iv. 29.

† Psal. cxlv. 18, 19.

